

# THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

## DENEYİMLİ ÖĞRETMENLERİN MESLEKİ GELİŞİMDEKİ ROLLERİ

**Dr. Süleyman Sadi SEFEROĞLU**

*Hacettepe Üniversitesi*

*Eğitim Fakültesi*

*Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü*

### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates teachers' perceptions of teacher development practices in Turkey, specifically the role of experienced teachers' in improving teaching/learning. It also looks at whether experienced teachers are helping new teachers, and the areas in which experienced teachers can help new teachers.*

*A survey was used to collect data on the role of experienced teachers in teaching/learning, on the activities in which they are involved, and their comments and recommendations. The population of this study includes all public elementary school teachers in the province of Ankara, Turkey. A representative sample of 500 subjects from 52 schools was selected.*

*Responses to the study questionnaire by a sample of 313 public school teachers, which is a close representation of the population by gender and school type, indicate that although the respondents overwhelmingly feel that experienced teachers should help new teachers, almost one half of the respondents believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers. Most of the participants think that experienced teachers do not help new teachers because new teachers are not asking for help, and many of them also believe that helping new teachers might be interpreted as interference.*

*Some of the ways the respondents suggested experienced teachers can help beginners were: giving them moral support and creating an environment in which teachers can be open and sincere about their problems and fears, inviting beginning teachers to their classrooms and giving sample lessons, and helping them to get to know their environment.*

**Keywords:** Teaching, experienced teachers, professional development, improving teaching.

### ÖZET

*Bu araştırma öğretmenlerin Türkiye'deki mesleki gelişim uygulamaları ile ilgili görüşlerini ve bu doğrultuda deneyimli öğretmenlerin öğretme-öğrenme süreçlerindeki rollerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca deneyimli öğretmenlerin göreve yeni atanan öğretmenlere yardımcı olup olmadıklarını ve yardımcı olabilecekleri alanları ortaya çıkarmaya yöneliktir.*

*Araştırmada veri toplamak için bir anket kullanılmıştır. Anket Ankara ilindeki 52 okulda 500 öğretmene uygulanmıştır. Anket sonuçları öğretmenlerin, deneyimli öğretmenlerin yeni öğretmenlere yardımcı olmaları gerektiğini düşündüklerini, ancak bunun gerçekleşmediğini göstermektedir. Araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler, deneyimli öğretmenlerin yeni öğretmenlere moral destek sağlayabileceklerini, yaratacakları olumlu bir ortamda onların sorunlarını paylaşılabileceklerini, onları kendi sınıflarına davet edebileceklerini, onlara örnek dersler verebileceklerini ve çevrelerine uyum sağlama konusunda yardımcı olabileceklerini belirtmektedirler.*

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Öğretme, deneyimli öğretmen, mesleki gelişim, öğretimi geliştirme.

### Introduction

Research on improving the quality of teaching suggests that professional development of teachers is necessary to have better qualified teachers, which means better teaching in the schools (Lieberman & Miller, 1991). One approach to studying and shaping the professional development of teachers is to address teachers' stages of concern (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Fuller, 1969). Fuller examined the developing concerns of small groups of prospective teachers and reexamined the findings of

other investigators to discover what teachers were concerned about and whether their concerns could be conceptualized in some useful way. According to her findings, teachers progress through developmental stages, starting with the initial stage of simply surviving the transition from student teachers to full-time instructional leader in a classroom. Her classification of teachers' concerns consists of three stages: a survival stage, a mastery stage and an impact stage.

The first phase involves survival concerns, which are

about one's adequacy and survival as a teacher, class control, being liked by pupils, and being evaluated. Varrah, Theune, and Parker (1986) also report that new teachers develop a survival mentality, which fits into Fuller's survival stage, and that they have to learn to swim very quickly or sink. Katz (1972) indicates that the discrepancy between anticipated successes and classroom realities intensifies feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness. She recommends that during this period the teacher needs support, understanding, encouragement, reassurance, comfort, and guidance.

The second phase, the mastery stage, includes concerns about development and mastery of teaching skills. These are concerns about limitations and frustrations in the teaching situation, methods and materials, and mastery of skills within the teaching learning situation. The third phase, the impact stage, reflects concerns about pupils, their needs, their growth and development, and relating to them as individuals.

From a developmental perspective, the early self-oriented concerns, which Fuller (1969) defines as the perceived problems of student teachers or beginning teachers, are characterized as less mature and desirable than the later pupil-oriented concerns, which are defined as perceived problems of experienced teachers. Fuller believes that later concerns cannot emerge until earlier concerns are resolved. The experience of becoming a teacher, she claims, involves coping with all three stages.

The importance of this classification is that her conceptualization of the problems experienced by teachers can be viewed as a basis for conceptualizing programs of teacher education. This is also what Glickman (1981) tried to account for in his work on developmental supervision. He theorized that different levels required different approaches to the individual.

Questions on the content of professional development or the appropriate sources of professional development can be answered easily when it is understood that there are multiple ways for teachers to learn from each other. In a study conducted by the Rand Corporation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978), which examined 293 federally funded school improvement programs, one of the basic assumptions proposed for effective staff development was recognition of teachers' clinical expertise, and their participation in project decisions. It was suggested that teachers' expertise is used in place of outside consultants. Berman and McLaughlin stated:

Project staff typically saw the assistance offered by outside consultants as too general, untimely, and irrelevant to the problems of their classrooms. ...Teachers, who are the closest to the problems and progress of project activities, are in the best position to suggest remedies for perceived de-

ficiencies. Moreover, where project activities and objectives reflected significant teacher input, the staff were more likely to invest the considerable energy needed to make the project work. The project, in short, was "theirs." (p. 27-29)

The issue of teacher development has been addressed to a limited degree in the literature on Turkish education. The focus has been more on the pre-service training of teachers, with little emphasis on in-service training. However, the questions of how teachers improve themselves and how they help each other in this process have not been closely investigated.

The recent Turkish literature on teacher education has dealt with inadequacies in the preparation of teachers in the teachers' colleges. However, little attention has been devoted to teachers' professional development while they are in a teaching/learning setting. Teachers have not been asked about their needs, problems, and concerns. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of their professional development opportunities, and whether they are aware of the sources they have in their own schools are not known.

Therefore, this study investigates teachers' perceptions of teacher development practices in Turkey while trying to answer the above questions, and finding out more about teachers' perceptions of their own personal and professional development; teachers' beliefs about teacher development opportunities, and teachers' beliefs about experienced teachers' role in teaching/learning, whether experienced teachers are helping new teachers, the areas experienced teachers can help new teachers, and finally teachers' suggestions for their own personal and professional development.

## Method

A survey was used to collect data on teachers' perceptions of professional development opportunities, activities in which they are involved, their comments and recommendations.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section of the questionnaire included questions to retrieve demographic information about participants, such as the type of the school in which they work, their gender, their educational background, experience in teaching, the number of years of teaching in the current school, and the grades taught. The information received through the questions in this section was used in the analysis of differences in the perceptions of teachers in regard to each research question.

The questions in the second section addressed teachers' perceptions of teachers' beliefs and feelings about their professional development, and experienced teachers' roles in teaching/learning were measured in this section of the questionnaire.

### **Population and Sample Selection**

The population of this study includes all public elementary school teachers in the province of Ankara, Turkey. A representative sample of 500 subjects from 52 schools was selected. The selection of the sample was done systematically from two alphabetized lists provided by the City Board of Education. The two lists, one for the city schools, and one for the village schools, included all the elementary schools in the Ankara province. Equal representation in terms of gender, educational background, and experience in teaching could not be guaranteed because the selection was done manually and the lists did not have information on these characteristics.

According to the State Institute of Statistics (1995), there were 1,113 elementary schools in the Ankara province in the 1992-1993 school year; 307 were city schools and 806 were village schools. The questionnaire was sent to a sample of 400 teachers from city schools, and 100 teachers from village schools in order to have a representative group of primary school teachers in the Ankara province (i.e., a stratified sampling procedure based on school type was used). Since the return rate for village schools was expected to be much lower than the rate for city schools, the proportion was decided accordingly.

Based on the lists provided by the City Board of Education, schools were selected randomly by picking every tenth school from each alphabetized list (i.e. a systematic sampling procedure was used). Since a computerized selection was not possible, the selection was done manually. The lists included how many teachers worked at each school; by adding up the number of teachers working at each selected school, the researcher stopped the selection process when 400 teachers were reached in city schools and 100 teachers were reached in village schools. In schools where there were split sections, only one section was selected. As a result of this selection process, 22 city schools and 30 village schools were chosen. Some of the survey questionnaires were then mailed and some distributed in person to the five hundred teachers in those schools.

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaires were mailed/distributed to teachers in the sample selected after the permission to administer the survey in the schools in Ankara province was obtained from the Ministry of Education. In the selected schools, all teachers were given the questionnaire. In the city schools, the researcher's assistants distributed the survey questionnaires to the teachers in person with the permission from the school administrators. The teachers were told that the surveys would be collected the following week. The research assistants visited each city

school twice after they distributed the questionnaires. On their first visit, the assistants collected the completed questionnaires, and reminded the teachers who had not completed the surveys, or could not locate them at that time to have them ready by their next visit. The follow-up procedures in village schools were done by sending teachers reminder postcards six weeks after the questionnaires were mailed. The reminder postcards were not sent to those who identified their names or schools on the survey questionnaires received by that date. However, all 43 surveys received from the village school teachers had already come before the reminder postcards were sent; no more surveys were received from village schools after the reminder postcards were mailed.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. All responses to close-ended items were entered for computer analysis. Statistical analysis of the data was done according to the research question. First, frequency distributions and percentages for each item were reported. The questionnaire was also analyzed in terms of the relationships between different variables, such as school type and size, gender, educational background, experience in teaching, grade level teaching, and teachers' perceptions of professional development opportunities.

### **Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

A total of 322 questionnaires were returned/collected. Since 9 of the returned surveys had too many unanswered questions/statements, these surveys were not used in the analyses. The 313 usable questionnaires provided a 64 percent return rate. The return rate from city schools was 69 percent, and from village schools 43 percent. Eighty-six percent of the study participants were from urban schools and about 14 percent from rural schools. These numbers match with the percentages of all urban and rural school teachers in primary schools in Ankara province, which were 88 percent and 12 percent respectively. That is, a representative sample was obtained. While 61 percent of the respondents were female, 39 percent were male. These percentages also match the percentages of all female and male teachers in primary schools in Ankara province, which are 62 percent and 37 percent respectively.

The majority of the teachers (85 %) who responded to the questionnaire were educated at junior college level, and most of them (75 %) had more than 15 years of experience. A majority of the participants (60 %) had been at their current school for 5 years or less, and most of them (78 %) had worked in both urban and rural environments. In terms of the number of teachers working in the schools in which this questionnaire was ad-



ministered, almost one half of the schools (48 %) had 51 or more teachers, 6 percent of them had only 1 teacher, 11 percent had 2-5 teachers, 16 percent had 6-25 teachers, and 19 percent had 26-50 teachers.

Most of the participants were teaching grade levels 1 to 5 with a relatively even distribution across grades. The rest included pre-school teachers (2 %), administrators (3 %), teachers with no classes (5 %), special education class teachers (.6 %), and combined class teachers (9 %).

About one half of the respondents (49 %) reported that they had been teaching their current grade level for one or two years. More than one third of them (38 %) had been teaching their current grade level for 3 to 5 years, 5 percent of them had taught the grade level they were currently teaching for 7 to 20 years, and the rest (8 %) had never before taught the grade level they were currently teaching.

## Results

The findings of this study are presented in two sections. First, teachers' beliefs about teacher development opportunities, teachers' beliefs about the experienced teachers' role in teaching/learning, whether experienced teachers are helping new teachers, and the areas in which experienced teachers can help new teachers were explored, and then teachers' suggestions for their own personal and professional development were examined.

### Teachers' Beliefs About the Experienced Teachers' Role in Teaching/Learning

The research question was aimed at finding out the current situation in the schools in terms of teachers' professional relationships with others, more specifically, professional interactions between experienced and new teachers. The distribution of answers is presented in Table 1.

Responses to the first question in the survey questionnaire indicated that the participants believe (almost one half of the respondents agreed with the statement) that experienced teachers do not help new teachers. On the issue of why they do not help new teachers, most of the participants (58 %) think that this is because new teachers are not asking for help (see Table 1), and many of them (47 percent) also believe that helping new teachers might be interpreted as interference. In addition to these reasons three teachers offered "being unhappy in the job because of an unsatisfactory salary" as another reason why experienced teachers do not help new teachers.

On the other hand, as a response to why they believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers, many of the participants seem to disagree or strongly disagree with statements such as "it is not their responsibility to help new teachers" (56 %), "new teachers should ex-

perience the same difficulties that they have had" (68 %), and "giving them teaching hints could make them more successful than they are" (75 %) (see Table 1).

This finding could be an indication that not many teachers believe that new teachers should not be helped, instead they think that the request should come from the other side. In other words, there is a big communication gap between the new teachers, the ones who need help, and the experienced teachers, the ones who could offer help in terms of how to utilize their resources.

Although one half of the respondents believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers, the participants overwhelmingly feel that experienced teachers should help new teachers (88 %).

As presented in Table 2, most of the respondents think that experienced teachers should help new teachers for a variety of reasons: to make a contribution to the teaching profession (96 %), to form new friendships (94 %), to become aware of their own potential (89 %), to see their own strengths and weaknesses (86 %), to learn new ideas and methods from new teachers (86 %), and finally to get the satisfaction of helping another individual (86 %). In addition to these, three teachers (.9 %) added that it would help to develop solidarity and trust among teachers if experienced teachers were to help new teachers.

Teachers believe that experienced teachers can help new teachers in a variety of areas. Table 3 presents the answers given by the participants in regard to the areas experienced teachers can help new teachers. Many teachers think that experienced teachers can help new teachers in areas such as using different teaching styles (98 %), finding instructional materials (94 %), planning classwork (91 %), evaluating students (91 %), motivating students (91 %), dealing with students' personal problems (87 %), and classroom discipline (81 %). In addition, 6 teachers (2 %) noted that experienced teachers can also help new teachers in parent-teacher relationships and in organizing social activities.

The respondents' educational background is related to whether or not they think experienced teachers help new teachers. School culture, which can be defined as a sum of relationships among different members in the school community, can be clearly seen in the perceptions of two groups of teachers with different educational backgrounds. More teachers with 'college and above' education than teachers with 'junior college and below' education seem to believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers. They also think that the reason why they do not want to help new teachers is because experienced teachers believe that giving new teachers teaching hints could make them more successful than they are.

Table 1: Distribution of Responses to Survey Questions on Experienced Teachers Role

Experienced teachers do not help new teachers because they believe that:	Frequencies and Percentages						
		DK*	SD*	D*	SWA*	A*	SA*
a- It is not their responsibility to help new teachers	N=246 %	22 8.9	52 21.1	87 35.4	31 12.6	42 17.1	12 4.9
b- New teachers are not asking for help	N=250 %	22 8.8	20 8.0	62 24.8	64 25.6	62 24.8	20 8.0
c- New teachers should experience the same difficulties that they have had	N=226 %	19 8.4	58 25.8	95 42.2	29 12.9	20 8.9	4 1.8
d- Giving them teaching hints could make them more successful than they are	N=234 %	13 5.6	80 34.2	95 40.6	23 9.8	16 6.8	7 3.0
e- Helping new teachers might be interpreted as interference	N=246 %	14 5.7	37 15.0	79 32.1	53 21.5	47 19.1	16 6.5

\*Legend: DK: Don't Know                      SD: Strongly Disagree                      D: Disagree  
SWA: Somewhat Agree                      A: Agree                      SA: Strongly Agree

Table 2: Distribution of Responses to Questions on Experienced Teachers Helping New Teachers

Experienced teachers should help new teachers because they can :	Frequencies and Percentages						
		DK*	SD*	D*	SWA*	A*	SA*
a- Learn new ideas and methods from new teachers	N=257 %	8 3.1	7 2.7	20 7.8	54 21.0	115 44.7	53 20.6
b- Become aware of their own potential	N=248 %	3 1.2	4 1.6	21 8.5	51 20.6	126 50.8	43 17.3
c- Get the satisfaction of helping another individual	N=242 %	4 1.7	5 2.1	23 9.5	49 20.2	108 44.6	52 21.5
d- Form new friendships	N=247 %	2 .8	3 1.2	10 4.0	35 14.2	124 50.2	73 29.6
e- See their own strengths and weaknesses	N=237 %	– –	6 2.5	26 11.0	38 16.0	118 49.8	49 20.7
f- Make a contribution to the profession	N=267 %	2 .7	1 .4	8 3.0	31 11.6	138 51.7	87 32.6
g- Experienced teachers should not help new teachers	N=206 %	9 4.4	94 45.6	80 38.8	5 2.4	8 3.9	10 4.9

\*Legend: DK: Don't Know                      SD: Strongly Disagree                      D: Disagree  
SWA: Somewhat Agree                      A: Agree                      SA: Strongly Agree

Table 3: Distribution of Responses to Survey Questions on the Areas Experienced Teachers Can Help New Teachers

Experienced teachers can help new teachers in areas such as :	Frequencies and Percentages						
		DK*	SD*	D*	SWA*	A*	SA*
a- Dealing with students' personel problems	N=252 %	2 .8	7 2.8	24 9.5	41 16.3	129 51.2	49 19.4
b- Classroom discipline	N=248 %	2 .8	11 4.4	34 13.7	48 19.4	119 48.0	34 13.7
c- Motivating students	N=252 %	— —	3 1.2	20 7.9	48 19.0	138 54.8	43 17.1
d- Evaluating students	N=247 %	— —	4 1.6	18 7.3	46 18.6	145 58.7	34 13.8
e- Planning classwork	N=250 %	1 .4	1 .4	20 8.0	40 16.0	145 58.0	43 17.2
f- Using different teaching styles	N=265 %	1 .4	1 .4	4 1.5	43 16.2	147 55.5	69 26.0
g- Finding instructional materials	N=247 %	4 1.6	1 .4	10 4.0	36 14.6	143 57.9	53 21.5
h- Experienced teachers should not help new teachers	N=212 %	8 3.8	102 48.1	75 35.4	4 1.9	13 6.1	10 4.7

\*Legend: DK: Don't Know      SD: Strongly Disagree      D: Disagree  
SWA: Somewhat Agree      A: Agree      SA: Strongly Agree

More women participants than men believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers because they think that helping new teachers might be interpreted as interference. Although many of the participants seem to be willing to share ideas, information, and instructional materials, they also have some reservations. Therefore, an organized way of teachers helping teachers might eliminate their doubts and contribute to the teaching-learning process.

The rural school teachers significantly differed from urban school teachers in their responses to statements about assigning mentor teachers and coaching each other in the classroom. More rural school teachers than urban school teachers emphasized the importance of assigning beginning teachers mentor teachers and coaching each other in the classroom. One interpretation of this difference could be that since rural teachers are mostly new teachers, they might need more help and therefore they might be more open and ready to use all the resources available.

**Teachers' Suggestions for Their Personal and Professional Development**

The distribution of responses to the given suggestions

that would be useful for teachers' personal and professional development is presented in Table 4.

The percentages indicate that sharing experiences, difficulties, concerns and problems is the most important factor which teachers think would be the most useful for teachers' personal and professional development (97 %). This is followed by sharing instructional materials (97 %), in-service courses (92 %), observing other teachers in the classroom (86 %), assigning mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers (82 %), and coaching each other in the classroom (60 %). As found in the first section of the questionnaire, where participants thought that supervisors were available but their availability did not contribute to their professional development, in terms of personal and professional development, supervisory activities were found to be considered the least useful activity (52 %) by the teachers.

The cross-tabulation revealed that there are significant differences between urban and rural school teachers in their responses to some suggestions for teachers' personal and professional development. As displayed in Table 5, more rural school teachers than urban school teachers believed that assigning mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers, coaching each other in the classroom,

and supervisory activities would be useful in the school setting. Since rural school teachers are mostly new teachers, they might need more help and therefore they might be more ready to use all the resources offered.

There was also a significant relationship between the gender of the participants and their responses to a suggestion for teachers' personal and professional development. More male teachers than female teachers think that coaching each other in the classroom would be useful in the school setting (see Table 6).

Another significant difference was found between the participants' educational background and their responses to some suggestions for teachers' personal and professional development. More teachers with 'college and above' education seem to believe that coaching each other in the classroom and supervisory activities would be useful in the school setting (see Table 7).

An interesting relationship was also found between the number of years participants spent at their current

school and their responses to a suggestion for teachers' personal and professional development. As shown in Table 8, almost all teachers (94%) who stayed in the same school for a long time (11-24 years) agreed that assigning mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers would be useful in the school setting for teachers' personal and professional development.

### Summary of Findings

Responses to the study questionnaire by a sample of 313 public school teachers, which is a close representation of the population by gender and school type, indicate that although the respondents overwhelmingly feel that experienced teachers should help new teachers, almost one half of the respondents believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers. Most of the participants think that experienced teachers do not help new teachers because new teachers are not asking for help, and many of them also believe that helping new teachers might be interpreted as interference.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses to the Given Suggestions That Would be Useful in the School Setting

Some of the following suggestions for teachers' personal and professional development may be derived from a review of literature in the field. To what extent these suggestions/activities do you think would be useful in the school setting?	Frequencies and Percentages						
		DK*	SD*	D*	SWA*	A*	SA*
a- Assigning mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers	N=247 %	13 5.3	10 4.0	20 8.1	45 18.2	112 45.3	47 19.0
b- Coaching each other in the classroom	N=238 %	13 5.5	13 5.5	68 28.6	68 28.6	60 25.2	16 6.7
c- Sharing instructional materials	N=238 %	1 .4	– –	7 2.9	39 16.4	148 62.2	43 18.1
d- Observing other teachers in the classroom	N=240 %	4 1.7	3 1.3	26 10.8	66 27.5	99 41.3	42 17.5
e- Sharing experiences, difficulties, concerns, and problems	N=271 %	– –	– –	8 3.0	21 7.7	161 59.4	81 29.9
f- In service courses	N=245 %	4 1.6	5 2.0	10 4.1	44 18.0	113 46.1	69 28.2
g- Supervisory activities	N=230 %	7 3.0	33 14.3	70 30.4	64 27.8	42 18.3	14 6.1

\*Legend: DK: Don't Know      SD: Strongly Disagree      D: Disagree  
 SWA: Somewhat Agree      A: Agree      SA: Strongly Agree

Table 5: Relationships Between School Type and Responses to Some Suggestions for Teachers’ Personal and Professional Development

Proportion Who Agree That	School Type				$\chi^2$
	Urban School		Rural School		
	N	%	N	%	(p)
Assigning mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers would be useful in the school setting	168	84.8	36	100.0	6.25*
Coaching each other in the classroom would be useful in the school setting	118	61.1	26	81.3	4.81*
Supervisory activities would be useful in the school setting	95	49.2	25	83.3	12.15**

(p<.01)\*\*      (p<.05)\*

Table 6: Relationship Between Participants’ Gender and Responses to a Suggestion for Teachers’ Personal and Professional Development

Proportion Who Agree That	Gender				$\chi^2$
	Male		Female		
	N	%	N	%	(p)
Coaching each other in the classroom would be useful in the school setting	69	71.1	73	58.4	3.84*

(p<.01)\*\*      (p<.05)\*

Table 7: Relationships Between Educational Background and Responses to Some Suggestions for Teachers’ Personal and Professional Development

Proportion Who Agree That	Educational Background				$\chi^2$
	Junior College and Below		College and Above		
	N	%	N	%	(p)
Coaching each other in the classroom would be useful in the school setting for teachers' personal and professional development	120	61.5	19	86.4	5.29*
Supervisory activities would be useful in the school setting for teachers' personel and professional development	95	49.7	20	83.3	9.67**

(p<.01)\*\*      (p<.05)\*

Table 8: Relationship Between Number of Years at the Current School and Responses to a Suggestion for Teachers’ Personal and Professional Development

Proportion Who Agree That	Number of Years at Current School						$\chi^2$
	1-5 Years		6-10 Years		11-24 Years		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	(p)
Assigning mentor teachers to assist beginning teachers would be useful in the school setting for teachers' personel and professional development	128	89.5	42	76.4	30	93.8	7.56*

(p<.01)\*\*      (p<.05)\*



Some of the ways the respondents suggested experienced teachers can help beginning teachers were: giving them moral support and creating an environment in which teachers can be open and sincere about their problems and fears, inviting beginning teachers to their classrooms and giving sample lessons, and helping them to get to know their environment.

Some of the ways the respondents suggested a pair of teachers can improve each other's teaching were: discussing professional matters and exchanging ideas, preparing lesson plans together, observing each other's teaching, and teaching each other's class.

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings show that about half of the participants believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers, and most of them think that it is because new teachers are not asking for help. However, rural school teachers are less likely to think that this is the reason. Many of them believe that experienced teachers do not help new teachers because they believe that giving new teachers teaching hints could make them more successful than they are. Because of this belief beginning teachers in rural schools may feel lonely and uncomfortable asking experienced teachers for help, even if they are able to find one. On the other hand, the participants overwhelmingly believe that experienced teachers should help new teachers. Most participants reported that experienced teachers could help new teachers in a variety of areas and that teachers, both experienced and new, could benefit from this process.

The most commonly mentioned suggestions by the respondents for how experienced teachers could help new teachers show that the problems new teachers are experiencing are well known by the participants. Some of the suggestions were: giving new teachers the moral support they need, being friends and creating an environment in which new teachers could be open and sincere about their problems and fears, and helping them by preparing lesson plans together. Conducting classroom observation, providing guidance, and introducing new teachers to different instructional methods and techniques which they have used successfully in their classes were other suggestions for ways experienced teachers could help new teachers. Since experienced teachers cannot offer solutions if new teachers do not talk about their problems, many teachers believe that the environment which experienced teachers are supposed to create is crucial in encouraging new teachers be open and talk about their problems.

This exploratory study represents an initial step in providing data in the Turkish context which can be used in planning, organizing, and offering professional development opportunities for elementary school teachers.

It is therefore an important contribution to efforts to improve quality in the Turkish educational system. As shown by research (Bolin, 1987; The Holmes Group, 1986; Zumwalt, 1986), the quality of teaching in schools cannot be improved without improving the quality of teachers. Therefore, continual professional development of teachers is crucial in school improvement efforts. Experienced teachers have a lot things to do in this process. However, their roles need to be clearly defined and how they can contribute to this process should be carefully planned.

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